Depot Town Rag

Volume 23, Number 1

January/February 2011

We take steps to a higher way of living

100% FREE *RAG* CONTENT

A PUBLICATION OF THE DEPOT TOWN ASSOCIATION, INC. The Old Caboose, 400 Market Place, Ypsilanti, Michigan 48198

Our ornate cornices were removed for safety reasons nearly half a century ago, but regular upkeep and artful paint jobs still invite close-up admiration of the upper stories

There's lofty thinking up here

Travel down Michigan Avenue all the way to downtown Detroit and hang your head out the car window like a happy dog on a hot day and you'll pass hundreds of former upstairs commercial properties in old neighborhoods that will break your heart. Boarded-up windows or stacks of boxes in permanent storage indicate these units are no longer inhabited by humans. Only bats, varmints, and rats live there now.

That's too bad. In a time when good housing is a priority, many potential living spaces have been given over to "benign neglect" or "deferred maintenance"—modern terms for "too lazy to make your own bed."

Ypsilanti, however, seemed to miss out on that ethic and stands as a good example of folks still enjoying the vicissitudes of the nineteenth century in modern times.

Reap the benefits of living waaaay upstairs

- Better air circulation and heat disribution with 16'-18' ceilings
- Back porches with cool stuff to watch
- Go downstairs for a beer or sandwich
- Friends are closer/privacy guaranteed
- Walk to breakfast, lunch, and dinner
- Daily aerobic workouts on the stairs
- Carry groceries from one of the few grocery stores left in the city: Ypsilanti Food Co-op
- Easiest access to the Farmers' Market
- Private box seats for train-watching
- Riverside and Frog Island Parks for your back yard
- Door-to-door salespeople can't find you...but the Home Tour planners sure can!

Second- [3rd & 4th] story men [and women] prosper in this old neighborhood

"My wife used to drive me to drink," one local denizen liked to say, "but now that I live down here I can walk!"

There's more truth than fiction in that cheesy gag line. Demographers note more people are giving up automobiles for public transportation from their inner-city residences. Some even more practical folk live so close to their work that they walk. Still others just slide down the stairs from their beds and land at their workstations.

What seems a new phenomenon is really an old residential/commercial concept. Ancient Greeks and Romans built their shops right up to the curb and grouped their family living quarters around a courtyard in the back. Charles Dickens' London saw merchants lodge their families in back of—or above—their shops. New York City residents saw nothing unusual about living above the bakery, bar, or bistro. Ypsilanti's two commercial districts were built that way originally, saw vacancies in the 1960s, and then opened their high-ceilinged spacious rooms to inhabitants once more as creative personalities eschewed the 'burbs for a more community-connected Life-In-The-Big-City.

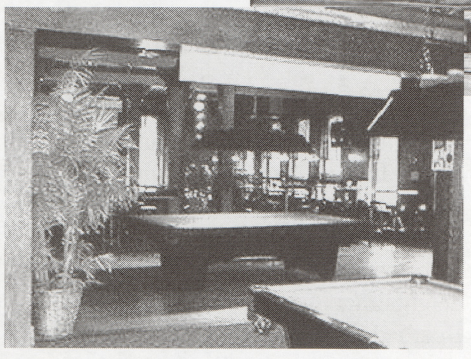
None of Depot Town's upstairs spaces connect through interior stairways any more. There are still locals who remember the steps at Weber Drug (Aubree's Saloon West) and McPherson & House Groceries (Enchanted Florist) that led to the owners' digs above.

Sidewalk strollers take for granted the tiny doorbells and residential mailboxes at front doors between display windows up and down E. Cross and N. River streets. Those are the entrances to upstairs apartments that have seen intense redesign over the years. Many have been featured on home tours in August and December, but they remain exclusive and private sanctuaries the rest of the year. Herewith, we feature some of the unique activities that hover above the more familiar street life in the neighborhood.

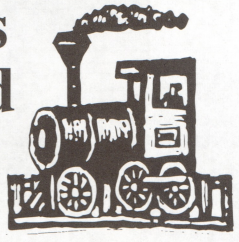
Frenchtown

Right: View from the Freighthouse shows sister Linda and brother Bill's complementing taverns next to the railroad tracks in Depot Town

Below: Sticks' pool tables stretch from E. Cross Street to the Farmers' Market



Upstairs at an old railroad saloon



"Jitterbug" wouldn't know the place today. He lived upstairs at the Oliver House/Alibi Bar (now Aubree's Saloon) for thirty-two years and was the last resident to leave in 1975 when Bill French bought the bar from his dad and decided to start renovating the second floor. A fire the previous year had convinced most of the tenants to leave, but Jitterbug, aka Bill Platt, was a part-time bartender and clean-up man in that building which had been a railroad hotel since 1870. He saw little reason to leave.

French well remembers the search they conducted to try to retrieve Jitterbug's ivory-handled pool cue that had fallen behind the back bar. They never were able to get it out, but they may still find it – as extensive remodeling continues in the area's oldest continuous-use facility.

Jitterbug is gone now, but his ghost may still inhabit the room he kept for a large part of his life. Although that space was quite utilitarian during the first big remodeling process, the finished product fools most casual observers. To keep the addition authentic, the Frenches bought another building in Jackson that was about to be demolished and moved the tin ceiling, wainscoting, trim and other nineteenth century niceties for installation in their new, second floor restaurant. The first upstairs commercial property on the block in recent years started out serving Mexican and American food and then featured live music jazz performances. Today it's called "Sticks" and has enough pool tables to extend a Willow Run-way. There's even a second-story deck with a great view of the Freighthouse and MCRR depot. And it's all done up in a Key West style for summer sitting.

Watch for Jitterbug. He's still there – in an old photo of Goebel Brewery horse-drawn wagon unloading kegs in front of Weber Drug and the Oliver House.

Special thanks to our professional printers

Those talented people at Harrington's Standard Printing brought their considerable skills into play every month to make our little neighborhood newsletter look as professional and "journalistic" as they possibly could with the material our writers and editor handed them. John and Patti, Juanita, Tina, and Steve kept the publication process going from first layout to final folding. And it was Sara Harrington who has been the guardian angel who monitored the entire process from start to finish each month, catching design flaws, typos, and dead space. Her ministrations to our graphics made *The Rag* discernable to even those who could not read the copy.

We are fortunate to have such professionals practicing their craft at our doorstep. Theirs is certainly known as the *standard* of excellence in *printing*.

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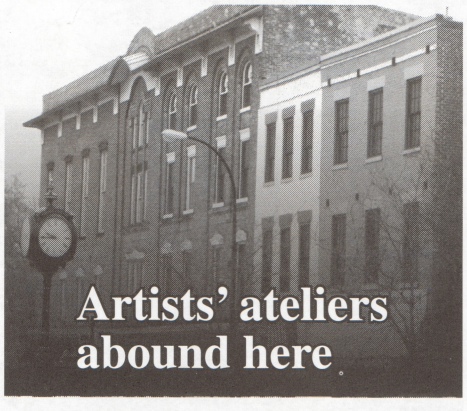
The People Upstairs

-Ogden Nash

The people upstairs all practice ballet
Their living room is a bowling alley
Their bedroom is full of conducted tours.
Their radio is louder than yours,
They celebrate weekends all the week.
When they take a shower,
your ceilings leak.
They try to get their parties to mix
By supplying their guests
with Pogo sticks.,
And when their fun at last abates,
They go to the bathroom on roller skates.
I might love the people upstairs more
If only they lived on another floor.



Artists' ateliers abound here

The upper floors of the Follett House and the much older stuctures just to the east are crawling with creative types. As visual artists found studio space in Depot Town for the past forty years, sociologists have marveled at how well they get along with the rest of the working class.

They drink the same beer and eat the same burgers and only elitists are surprised by the happy compatibility existing up and down the block.

www.nelsonamosstudio.com

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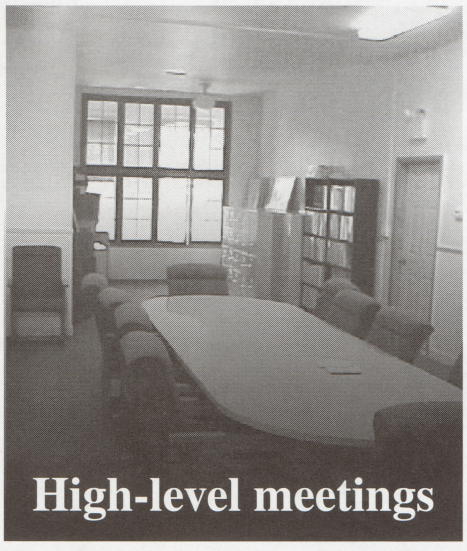

High-level meetings

The ballroom at the Fraternal Order of Eagles didn't look anything like today's meeting room in the space now occupied by the EMU American Association of University Professors

Howard Bunsis, president of EMU-AAUP, maintains the faculty organization's offices and meeting rooms on the second floor at 33B, East Cross Street, creatively spelling out their acronym in the seven front windows--a good use of the structure's orginal nineteenth century technology.

Innovative prepared foods program expands to Depot Town facility

Harvest Kitchen, a community supported agriculture (CSA) program, has received a $28,603 grant from the US Department of Agriculture and leased new kitchen space that will allow the company to increase capacity, work with more area farmers, and develop new farm-to-consumer distribution channels.

Founded in 2007, Harvest Kitchen prepares fresh, locally sourced vegetables, fruits, grains and meats into dishes and meals for members who purchase subscriptions. Working directly and indirectly with 20 small farmers and producers, Harvest Kitchen currently serves 60 families and has garnered excellent reviews for its tasty, creative menus and commitment to the local food movement.

The grant was awarded under the Farmers Market Promotion Program run by the USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service, which supports programs that make fresh, local, and healthy produce more readily available to consumers. The funds will be used toward the purchase of commercial grade kitchen equipment in the company's newly leased space, the former Queen of Hearts bakery at 32 E. Cross Street.

"This grant and the new space will allow us to significantly increase our capacity to receive, process, and store the bounty of our local farmers and producers year-round," says Michelle Hartmann, Harvest Kitchen's co-owner. "We're proud of the opportunities and connections we've helped create for these farmers. Consumers certainly benefit from new and convenient ways to purchase and enjoy local foods, and in doing so help expand the local food economy. It's a win for everyone."

See this glorious downtown façade in full color in the next iSPY

Everything's on the up-and-up in Ypsilanti

There are no basement apartments in Depot Town or in Downtown Ypsi. This is not the Athens of the Midwest...where parents make their kids live in the basement next to the furnace and hope to keep them skinny enough to escape out a ventilator window in case of fire.

We sleep in above-ground bedrooms with closets and windows. We're terribly civilized here in Ypsilanti.

Never-before published Depot Town apartment rental contacts

Fine	734- 434-4555
French	734-657-5494
Klaassen	734-390-3900
McKeever	734-483-4256
Richie	734-484-1510
Sikorski	743-483-1520

Be prepared with references, deposits, and a readiness to volunteer for a committee to help with neighborhood promotion.

What can a new resident do down here to start to feel as comfortable as the old buildings? Volunteer to help with any of the neighborhood projects:

Cruise Nights • Ypsilanti Heritage Fest
Rubber Ducky Race • Michigan ElvisFest
Summer Beer Festival • Roots Jamboree
Farmers' Market • Antique Auto Shows
...you can walk to the Ypsi Food Co-op!

It's community events like these that made this the kind of place where you wanted to live, so ask your new landlord how you can get involved. Best way to *have* good neighbors is to *be* a good neighbor.

Grazers vs. browsers: It's an animalistic kind of thing

Grazing animals feed off the ground. Cows and sheep graze in the pasture. *Browsing* animals feed from the higher branches of shrubs and trees. Deer and giraffes (obviously) eat higher up. At summer's end many woodlots seemed trimmed to the same overhead level by foraging deer whose living space we have usurped.

Browsing through a store indicates the customer is searching for merchandise placed higher up on shelves, counters, even hanging from the ceiling.

Grazers in Depot Town sit at the sidewalk tables or in the first floor doorways as they greet their neighbors.

The district's *browsers* go upstairs—to play pool, have meetings, write stories, paint canvases, throw parties, dance to live music, nap on porches, and live in their elevated residences.

Find us in iSPY next month!

The logo of "The Fabulous Hudson Hornet" dominated the stock car racing scene throughout the 1950s

Unsolicited testimonial

Subject: Just toured your museum
From: Paul Wilbur
Date: Thu, 5 Aug 2010
To: hudsondealer@ ypsiautoheritage.org
Dear Jack,

Yesterday, my wife Ann and I toured your lovely Miller dealership/Auto Heritage Museum. I have to tell you that I have toured the world and have made it to numerous (literally hundreds of automotive museums) and I find your place to be absolutely charming and authentic. Most museums today have lost the thousands of little marketing pieces, the memorabilia, the parts catalogs, the parts themselves, the detailed accounts of a given Marque. Boy, Jack, you have not missed a beat. I loved touring your museum, and even more so, I love the authenticity of it.

The history books always report the "kool-aid" version for what really happens to many automotive brands, but I felt like I had walked back into time…to see you and your dealership during the era when Hudson was king. And Kaiser, Frazier, Corvair, Terraplane and even the shell of a Tucker. WOW! I didn't even know that Preston Tucker once lived in Ypsilanti. Very cool.

I would strongly encourage you to not change your museum to one of the more modern "soda pop" museums. We have enough of those in America — with carnival rides and electric display boards. Those newer ones certainly look and taste sweet but they lack the depth of knowledge and insight that you have in your facility. Like great wine, the great stories are ones to remember, aging wonderfully with time and only through deep knowledge do we gain true understanding. We often forget these great stories… of great production facilities, overcoming adversity, the strength of American innovation and the true personalities and characters who made America great.

Well, Jack, I can say that it is alive and well at the Ypsilanti Automotive Heritage Museum - - Jack Miller's place.

[Paul B. Wilbur is CEO and President of Aptera Motors Inc. in Oceanside, CA]

TOTAL DOMINATION

Jack Miller's new book will thrill stock car **fans, vin**tage car buffs, loyal Depot Towners, and all mavens of the Ypsilanti Automobile Heritage Museum. **"Total Domination: The Story of the Fabulous Hudson Hornet's Amazing Success on America's Stock Car Tracks"** tells the story with vintage photos, company letters, and Jack's insider-view of the marvelous automobiles that went through the doors of his dad's historic dealership here.

Long before the Michigan International Speedway in the Irish Hills was even a dream, Miller associate, John A. Conde was rescuing artifacts from the Hudson Motor Car Company in Detroit. Their collaboration and Jack's background in the local Hudson dealership provided just the right stage for documenting this dynamic and important portion of American stock car racing.

Jack's dad, Carl L. Miller, would be proud of his son. His big 238-page paperback is full of action, history, and authentication of a unique portion of the automobile industry. Miller has put together a compendium of valuable artifacts that resonate far beyond Depot Town and into the realm of America's history of auto racing.

[Available at the Ypsilanti Auto Museum ...and the author will autograph your copy right there while you wait!]

In the next *Rag* (in *iSPY*):

Peek in these old WINDOWS and you'll find 172 years of corny stories that now qualify as history lessons (in the **iSPY** *tabloid)*

Depot Town Rag

"All the news that fits, we print"
A monthly publication of
the Depot Town Association, Inc.
The Old Caboose, 400 Market Place
Ypsilanti, Michigan 48199
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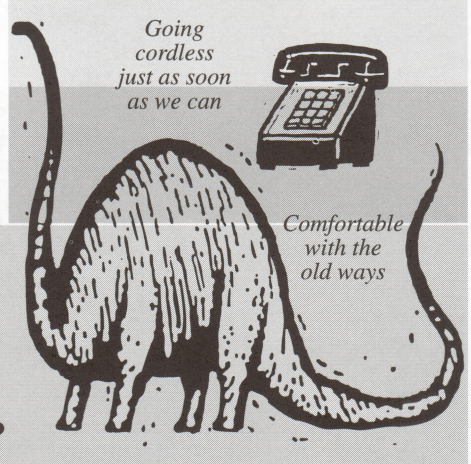
thomasdodd@comcast.net

The Depot Town Association, Inc.

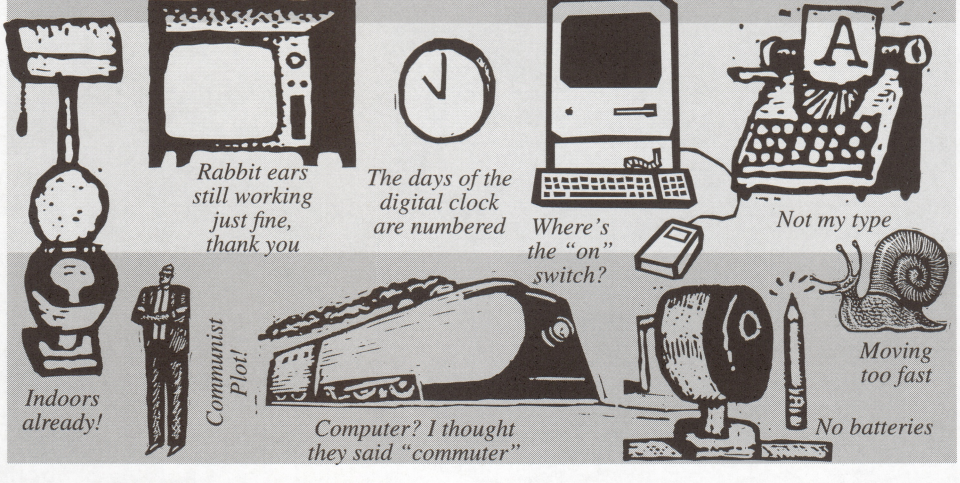
Gary McKeever, President
Michelle Shankwiler, Vice President
Ruth Ann Jamnick, Treasurer
Sandee French, Scy. & Past President
Website: www.depottown.org
DTA meets at 6:30 p.m on the third Wednesday of each month at Café Luwak, 42 East Cross Street.



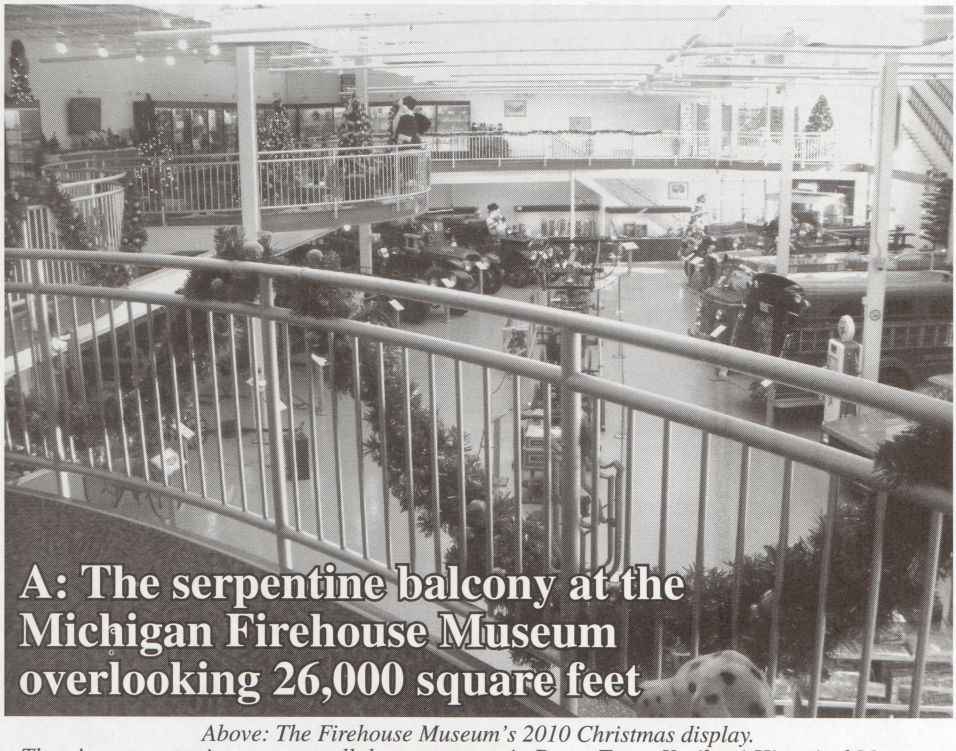
Depot Geezers tackle technology:

Ready for the switch from a 6-pager to a full-color tabloid?

Here's the run-down on how we're adjusting...

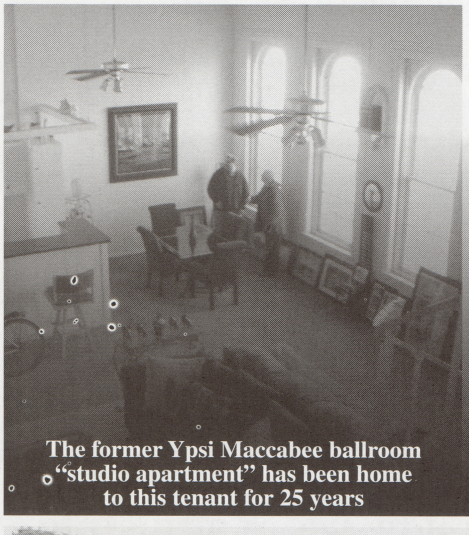

Rabbit ears still working just fine, thank you
The days of the digital clock are numbered
Where's the "on" switch?
Not my type
Indoors already!
Communist Plot!
Computer? I thought they said "commuter"
No batteries
Moving too fast

Q: What's our most expansive upstairs space?



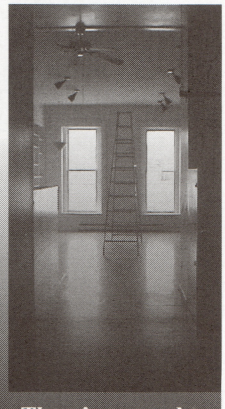
A: The serpentine balcony at the Michigan Firehouse Museum overlooking 26,000 square feet

Above: The Firehouse Museum's 2010 Christmas display. There's more upstairs access at all three museums in Depot Town: Ypsilanti Historical Museum is a "house museum" with nineteenth century rooms furnished in the manner of the Daniel Quirk family, Ypsilanti Auto Museum has Hudson motorcar memorabilia in a second floor many never knew existed. Browsers are greatly rewarded when they explore the local collections.

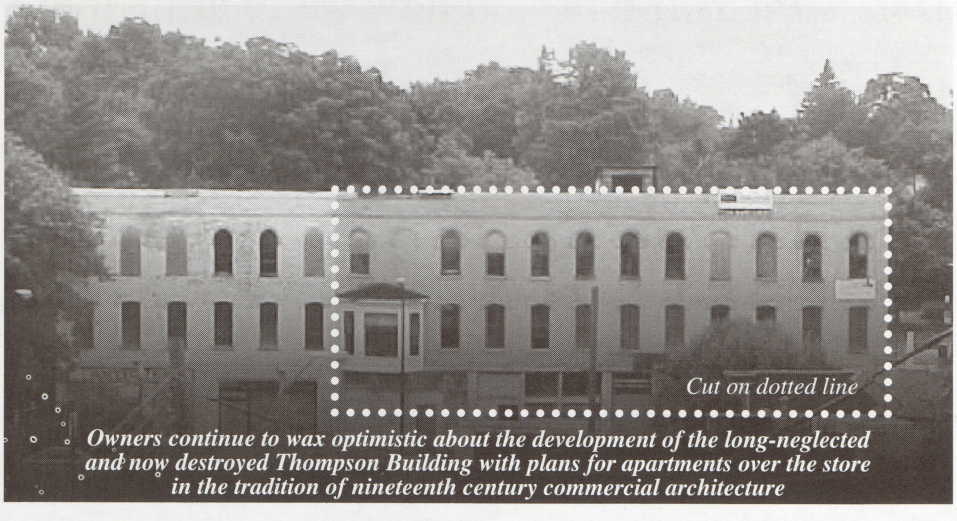


The former Ypsi Maccabee ballroom "studio apartment" has been home to this tenant for 25 years

This 2nd/3rd story loft is connected by a contemporary oak spiral staircase



There's no need to duck for headroom with these ceilings



Cut on dotted line

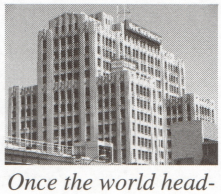
Owners continue to wax optimistic about the development of the long-neglected and now destroyed Thompson Building with plans for apartments over the store in the tradition of nineteenth century commercial architecture

"Bee Hive" flourished at the Maccabees Hall

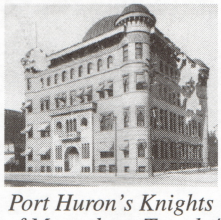
Often called the Masonic Temple, the third floor ballroom at 46 E. Cross (above Clover Computers, The Hair Station, and Enchanted Florist) was first known as the Maccabbee Hall. Lodges for men (and sometimes women) flourished in the nineteenth century and, during prohibition some of them were the only place in town where you could find a drink. Others enjoyed sobriety and still others were egalitarian enough to provide space for women!

Ypsilanti's Ladies Lit Club still holds forth in their Greek temple on N. Washington Street, and many of the members use their husbands' name rather than their own.

Depot Town's Maccabees Hall had a similar "Ladies' Club" across the alley in the Newell Block, above today's Café Luwak. On an overcast day, you can smell the veal cutlets being prepared for the men's ceremonies.



Once the world headquarters, Detroit's Maccabees Building is now part of Wayne State University



Port Huron's Knights of Maccabees Temple/ Hotel was destroyed by fire in 2000

Port Huron's Ladies' Maccabees (Bee Hive) still stands

Maccabee lodge coins have been discovered in several places in Depot Town

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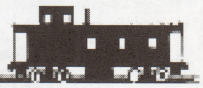
It's not the end of the line after all...



"I spy" a slick new format for this old *Rag*

Our little neighborhood newsletter began in 1976 and has changed its format four times since then. This issue marks the end of publishing the current format for the *Depot Town Rag*—defined as a newspaper put together by non-professionals. After this printing, readers will find us in the pages of Ypsi's newest 'city slicker," *iSPY*. That's "Ypsi" spelled backwards, so *Rag Reports* ought to fit in just fine.

We still plan to tell the neighborhood's stories with the same non-professional style to which our readers have become accustomed. We'll stick a little bit of history into the historical hoopla down here—and we plan to continue making up some of it too. As TV's History Channel likes to say, "History is made here every day."

We made a little bit of history, ourselves; after this issue the only places our readers will be able to find the old *Rags* is in the Archives of the Ypsilanti Historical Society and the archives of the Bentley Historical Library on the University of Michigan's north campus. Most of our issues are on file in these repositories, but the few mysteriously missing copies may turn up in an auction at Sotheby's some day.

Ahead of the curve

Many of our sponsors now have their own web sites that are much more sophisticated than anything that ever appeared here in print. Those folks kept us going through the tough times and we always appreciated their support and their colorful stories.

We'll still knock out neighborhood news in the traditional monthly newspaper fashion, but readers will find it in the tabloid pages of *iSPY*. And you will still be able to follow neighborhood promotions from your laptops, iPods, and home computers. We're getting terribly modern down here.

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RAGTIME

Links to local websites

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Starting next issue:
Look for
The Depot Town Rag
in the pages of
iSPY
along with
emYOU! the Magazine

QUIZ:

Why the three-fold *Depot Town Rag* went down the tubes

(Correct answers appear at bottom)

1. The neighborhood is so small that we have run out of stories to tell.
2. We're going on YouTube with a no-words/just-dumb-graphics format.
3. It's the economy, stupid.
4. A whole year of limited traffic access has hurt much of our block's business.
5. Nobody reads hard copy any more. We're moving to a Town Crier/Talk Radio format.
6. The Historic District Commission censured the Depot Town Association for "being just too modern."
7. We ran out of volunteer models to pose for the centerfolds.
8. Younger readers' shorter attention spans require fewer stories, more text messages, tweets, and tattoos.
9. *The Ypsilanti Press* and *The Ann Arbor News* are gunning for us.
10. The new format will be the only newsprint left in town.

(Correct answers: 3, 4, 10)

Ypsilanti Historical Society
Museum and Archives
(free admission)

Hours: 2:00 to 5:00pm
Tuesday thru Sunday
220 North Huron Street
Ypsilanti, MI 48197
www.ypsilantihistoricalsociety.org
Museum: 734-482-4990 *Archives: 734-217-8236*

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